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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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GENEVA FOR RMA

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SUBJECT: SUDAN REFUGEES: ALL UNHCR 'PERSONS OF CONCERN'
RELEASED FROM DETENTION. GOE CONSIDERING ALTERNATIVES TO
DEPORTATION FOR REMAINDER.

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

Reference: Cairo 639 and previous.

Summary

1. (SBU) Emboffs met separately February 9 with MFA and UNHCR to discuss the status of Sudanese asylum seekers in Cairo. All UNHCR 'persons of concern' have been released, leaving the fate of the remaining 156 detainees in question. MFA contacts rule out deportations in the short term, and believe none of the Sudanese will be prosecuted. The GOE promises to share contents of its investigation of the December 30 incident with the Embassy but does not expect GOE security personnel to be punished. The GOE is considering tightening its restrictions on Sudanese entry into the country but has patched relations with UNHCR and does not intend to change the way refugees are dealt with here. UNHCR is still checking for discrepancies in the numbers of those detained and killed and has begun an analysis of the legal entitlements available to Sudanese in Cairo to enable it to identify gaps and to target assistance needs. The numbers of asylum seekers coming to UNHCR's Cairo office have now dropped to manageable levels. End Summary.

No 'Persons of Concern' in Custody

2. (SBU) Emboffs met separately February 9 with Nasser Hamzawy, Head of MFA's Office of Refugee Affairs, and UNHCR Chief of Mission, Saad Al Attar, to discuss the status of the Sudanese asylum seekers remaining in detention following their forcible eviction from a sit-in in a downtown park December 30. Al Attar is satisfied that all UNHCR 'persons of concern' have been released including all women and minors, all Darfurians, those with valid visas or residence permits, those with refugee status, and those who had previously registered with UNHCR.

Deportations in Doubt

3. (SBU) Hamzawy seemed to cast doubt on a January 8 GOE statement asserting that those found to be in the country illegally would be deported. He suggested that 'some way' would be found to release them and to legitimize their presence in Egypt at least for a while - perhaps by giving them temporary visas or residence permits - and then to consider deportation for those who subsequently failed to adjust their status.

GOE Investigation Nearly Complete

3. (SBU) Hamzawy said that a GOE report of an investigation of the December 30 incident was now with the Office of the Prosecutor General and the Ministry of the Interior and would probably be completed next week. Hamzawy promised to share its contents with us. He is confident that the report will exonerate the Egyptian security forces who took part in the eviction and will instead blame the Sudanese for the debacle and the subsequent loss of life. He confirmed that the death toll stood at 27 - not counting a subsequent suicide and the death a few days ago of a demonstrator injured in the incident. Hamzawy gave us a list of the deceased.

4. (SBU) UNHCR has been unsuccessful in its attempts to obtain a list of those evicted from the park on the morning of December 30 - if such a list exists. It wants to check this list against the names of those deceased, the list of 4,000 demonstrators provided by leaders of the sit-in on

December 17, and the list of those who have received UNHCR assistance after the incident. UNHCR believes this would show up any discrepancies in the death toll and the numbers still in detention.

GOE May Restrict Visas for Sudanese

15. (SBU) We asked Hamzawy if the GOE intended to adopt any new measures to deal with Sudanese asylum seekers in the future. For example, would the GOE consider tightening entry restrictions on Sudanese migrants? Would it consider sharing some of the burden of identifying and assisting asylum seekers in Cairo? Hamzawy hinted that, as an imperative, the GOE was reviewing the current situation where three-month visas are freely available to Sudanese in Khartoum. The GOE also wanted more money to deal with refugees but did not envisage taking on any more responsibility for registering, recognizing, or assisting refugees. This was UNHCR's responsibility, Hamzawy said.

UNHCR to Analyze Gaps in Legal Status of Sudanese

16. (SBU) The team from UNHCR's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) has completed its lessons-learned investigation (reftel) and has returned to Geneva. In the meantime UNHCR has begun an 'analysis of the legal framework' for the status of Sudanese in Egypt. It will examine the provisions and implementation of the Four Freedoms Agreement and other commitments that establish the legal status of Sudanese in Cairo. UNHCR hopes that this review will help it identify any gaps in the entitlements available to Sudanese - for housing, employment, health care, and so on. UNHCR believes such an analysis is the first step towards developing proposals for a program of finely targeted assistance measures.

UNHCR Cairo Under less Pressure

17. (SBU) Al Attar reports that the Cairo office is under less pressure than two weeks ago when it was dealing with up to 800 asylum seekers a day (reftel). The numbers coming to the office have now dropped to manageable levels of around 150-200 per day. The office had been closed during the demonstration and has handed out around 1,600 applications for registration since it reopened a month ago. About 1,500 of these are Sudanese. Some are newcomers and some are ID renewals. The remaining 100 are a mixture of Somalis and Iraqis. UNHCR is also looking to move its offices to a more functional location outside Mohandeseen.

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